READING LETTERS WRITTEN 4500 YEARS AGO

Dr. Langdon of the University of Pennsylvania Museum is finding some remarkable documents on clay tablets dug out of Babylonian ruins. An interesting light has been shed on this ancient civilization of the Mystic East

UNDOUBTEDLY the Sumerian-Akkadian gentleman of 2500 B. C. took down from the shelves of his library a copy of "The Handy Letter Writer" and sought the model upon which he might build the important communication he had in hand.

To his wife he made little hen scratches and scrawls that great scholars tell us read: "Beloved light of mines eyes: Thy extravagances are beyond all the patience of man. Behold, thy slave is returning without the shekels thou so brazenly hast demanded. Ever thy devoted husband."

Or, to a slave overseer who had wittingly or unwittingly done him in some household deal, he stylused in hot haste: "It is with sorrow that thy stupidity is borne upon my consciousness. Thou hast cheated me in scales and in price. D—— thee, thou art not worth three bekas a week!"—which is probably what a slave's food cost then. This, according to May Bosman, writing in the New York Sun. She continues:

At all events, the great wealth of tablet records dug up in Mesopotamia in recent years and cleaned and deciphered shows so many little familiar, intimate touches and such an abundance of letter writing on all subjects under the sun that the possibility of the existence of epistolary guides then must be borne upon our consciousness, too.

An interesting lot of deciphering of such tablets is being accomplished by Dr. Stephen Langdon, who came in September from Oxford, England, to be curator of the Babylonian division of the University of Pennsylvania museum in Philadelphia.

He is a young man still, but he is the only man living who has seen and handled all the thousands of tablets unearthed by University of Pennsylvania museum expeditions above the city of Nippur, both those retained by the authorities at Constantinople and those sent to Philadelphia.

There are only about 15 men in the world who can read Sumerian and Babylonian characters, and he is one of them. Thanks to the war, which has left Oxford a dull, dead spot, America has secured him for one year. He will decipher as many as possible of the thousands of tablets that have been cleaned at the University of Pennsylvania museum, will publish translations of all important ones, now or later, and will classify and catalogue the collection, a stupendous task.

In 2500 B. C. papyrus and paper for writing were unknown. Men scratched with a pointed steel instrument called a stylus on unbaked red clay tablets of various sizes, mostly about the size, shape and thickness of a small book. They wrote on both sides, and then, if they were not through, continued on another tablet. The analogy of these tablets to sheets of paper is not hard to comprehend. Sometimes a tale stops in the middle and the next tablet on which it was continued is never found, or is found years later.

In the temples scribes were busy copying old pieces of literature to hand down to posterity, just as later monks spent their days and their nights copying laboriously and preserving old books for the archives of the monastery. The work of the amanuenses was placed on shelves in library—neat little rows and piles of clay books. Men digging 5,000 years later have found them, and other men have spent their lives in studying them, that they might tell us what the tablets say.

The books cover a wide field and comprise odes, epics, religious hymns, dictionaries, scientific pamphlets. The old Babylonian and Sumerian temples were, also, great industrial, commercial, agricultural and stock-raising centers, and they kept a vast number of documents relating to these various interests.

Millions of tablets have been found recording sales of cattle, slaves and staple goods; marriage contracts and agreements; divorce decrees; wills; receipts for innumerable things from jewelry and woman's dresses to human chattels. There are the timekeepers' slips of the temple workers, and bookkeeping accounts. Doctor Langdon has found that one big banking house did business in the city of Babylon for 600 years.

The great bulk of the tablets have been found on the site of the ancient temple of Nippur in Babylonia. This temple was both a religious center and a college designed primarily for the education of priests, but the range of textbooks unearthed there shows that instruction began at a primary stage and continued through elementary and grammar grades to the regulation college course, as Babylonians conceived it, and to theological classes. The textbooks show a high order of intellectuality. Indeed, the resemblances of these people to us of today bring home again the unchangeableness of the great antiquity of civilization, so called.

Boys' exercise books have been found repeatedly, in this and in other collections. They were like present-day school slates, but made of wet clay, and the little fellow marked on them with a stylus, and when he made a mistake blotted it out with his thumb.

The quality and range of the textbooks astonish one. Books on mathematics abound; they taught the multiplication table up to 2,400 and 2,500 times a number. In their financial transactions Sumerians had to do stupendous calculations in their heads. Doctor Langdon has just found, too, a comprehensive volume used in the study of law; and among the grammar books one dealing particularly and completely with the use of the preposition. A race that has arrived at the preposition is by no means primitive! The date of this book is 2,300 B. C.

Geography was taught, as were astronomy and history. In the collection is the oldest history yet found, a tablet giving the list of Babylonian kings going back to the flood. The claim is that it is a record of 25,000 years; but this may be disputed, since the names of the monarchs, which seem to be those of men who reigned successively, may be of men who ruled simultaneously, in kingdoms that were adjacent. A conservative estimate is that this history covers 14,000 years.

There is a book on botany, teaching the people how to raise the date palm, an important crop of the times. Agricultural books abound, for the temple had a collegiate department, just as have Cornell and other American universities, where scientific farming was taught. The Babylonians, as is well known, were remarkable engineers and past masters in the field of irrigation. It is not surprising that Doctor Langdon has found many records of this in the museum's Babylonian collection. We learn, again, of canals being dug, and of a tablet that chronicles the opening of a great waterway, like the Panama canal—the celebration over it, the presence of the king, and the pride felt in the great skill of its engineers.

Further documents are reported verifying previous assertions that the Babylonian woman received an education equal to man's, took her place with him in certain lines, and was compensated with the same wage as he.

"Books" had no cases and when found are often crumbled, broken, cracked or so badly chipped that parts of the translation must be guessed at or omitted entirely. Others, fortunately, are found intact.

Letters, on the other hand, were sent in envelopes, also of clay. When the tablet letter had been duly inscribed and signed, it was rolled in a fine clay powder and slipped into a hollow clay pocket. More clay dust was then shaken in, so that layers of powder were packed about the contents of the pocket and the letter could not get rubbed or scratched. The clay opening was then sealed and stamped with the sender's ring.

Afterward, the address was added and a slave dispatched with it. Later, we know that Babylonian and Sumerian governments supported regular postal systems. It is quite possible that that regime was in existence in 2300 B. C.

Many letters are found with seals unbroken, and these are marvellously preserved in their soft powdered pads. We can only surmise the reason for their sealed state. Perhaps a man kept sealed copies of the most important letters he had to write. Duplicate copies of records and transactions have been unearthed, sometimes miles apart; and the same practice could have held, rationally, of letters.

Some of these letters may never have been delivered, thanks to an inefficient postal service in some particular locality; or, and this is more plausible, the breaking out of frequent revolutions could have conceivably crippled the Babylonian post offices and left many letters forever undelivered.

Indubitably the oldest undelivered letter in the world is in the Babylonian collection of the University of Pennsylvania museum. Its date would be 2200 B. C., and Doctor Langdon opened and read it only last week!

It is from a master to his slave or to some underling or employee. Obviously, it is only one of several letters, since it refers to previous correspondence and to a previous transaction over which the writer is perturbed. Its archaic Sumerian is dictatorial, overbearing and peevish, and rants of some unsatisfactory flour deal that the underling has undertaken. One wonders whatever became of that flour!

Other tablets now being catalogued have pictures on them. One, a hunting scene, reminds one of the prehistoric cave drawings found in France. There is another of a battle scene, very much broken but rare and interesting.

The coming of Doctor Langdon to the University of Pennsylvania museum is timely and fortunate. The Babylonian division has had no curator since the beginning of the European war, when Dr. Arno Poebel left to join his regiment at the German front. The Eckley B. Coxe, Jr., expeditions, which began operations in Egypt in 1889 and have carried them on through various years since, even finding localities of the war-ridden land where they can still operate this year, have sent back to the museum an incalculable treasure-trove, not only in tablets, but in all kinds of articles dug up from the dirt layers of Biblical and pre-Biblical lands.

All this accumulation has not had the attention it deserved. Doctor Langdon's labors will be bent toward arranging the Babylonian exhibit. The collection is the largest in the world. No other museum has such a quantity of sacred Sumerian documents, which make this the most important Babylonian collection in the world, even though it is not so large as that in the British museum.

The war, which already has done so much damage, bids fair to rob us of this comparative recent achievement, the ability to decipher these tablets which tell of the lives and histories of peoples who lived so many hundred years ago. Younger men, like Poebel, are at the front and may never come back; other well-known Egyptologists are old men.

Not enough young men will be left to carry on the work of translating the ancient cuneiform writings. When the present scholars pass away the achievement may die with them and Sumerian-Akkadian become again a dead language, for not enough young college men are proposing to take up archeology.

There is today no endowed seat of Assyriology in any university. The University of Pennsylvania museum is exerting every effort to secure such an endowment, that other intellects of so high an order as Doctor Langdon's may be encouraged and helped to carry on a work similar to his.

Eckley B. Coxe, Jr., died in Philadelphia in September last and left an endowment fund of $500,000 to carry on the work he has been equipping expeditions to do in Egypt so many years. But one expedition can only scratch the surface of the myriad hills there and the countless buried and forgotten cities that lie beneath them.

"Our only hope of getting the rest of the tablets buried there," says Doctor Langdon, "is to go back to Nippur again and again, and dig for them." Endowments for these expeditions are another of the crying needs of scholars. The world at large will lose if archeological excavations and research have to be abandoned.

There is no doubt that the general public appreciates the work done by museums and by scholars. To Biblical students alone there is inexhaustible pleasure and satisfaction to be derived from facts unearthed of Biblical and pre-Biblical peoples.

There is now complete agreement among archeologists that Hammurabi is that same Amraphel of Genesis 14:1, a contemporary of Abraham. From chronological inferences it follows that Abraham may well have attended school at the temple in Nippur; nay, that he studied these very books that are now in the University of Pennsylvania museum. He may have read there the account of the creation. Why not? The dates dovetail.

"Let me take out and touch one of those tablets," said a religious man recently in the University of Pennsylvania museum. "I believe in my heart that the hand of Abraham must have held any or all of them nearly 5,000 years ago!"

Greek Meets Greek.

Some Scots were enjoying the fun of the fair. Seeing an old fiddler in the street, a few of them went over to him, and one, handing him two-pence, asked him to play the "Battle of Stirling Brig." The old fiddler took the money and went rasping away the same as before. The audience getting tired of this, the spokesman again went over to the fiddler and said to him: "Hi, man, that's no' the 'Battle of Stirling Brig.'" "I ken," replied the old fiddler, "that's the skirmish before the battle."

Temperance Notes

(Conducted by the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union.)

CHALLENGE OF A BIG TASK.

A few paragraphs from the address of Miss Anna A. Gordon, president National W. C. T. U., at Indianapolis, Ind., November 17, 1916:

"Exultant praise fills our hearts as we meet in our forty-third annual convention. These are glorious fruition days. We praise God for the resistless sweep of state-wide prohibition on November 7, 1916. Michigan victorious! Nebraska victorious! South Dakota victorious! Montana victorious! Alaska victorious! Washington beat the brewers and held her law! Colorado beat the brewers and held her law! Arizona beat the brewers and held her law! Arkansas beat distillers and brewers and held her law. Idaho, already blessed by statutory prohibition, voted three to one to place prohibition in the bedrock of her state constitution. In seven of these eleven states women not only worked for victory but helped vote it in—on election day. Great Britain recently presented to the government a memorial more than eleven miles in length for national prohibition during the war and six months after. There were over 2,000,000 signatures to the huge petition. Mrs. Humphrey Ward, one of its influential indorsers, lately said, 'There will be a new wind blowing through England when this war is done.' This same prohibition wind has blown the liquor traffic out of nine of Canada's ten provinces, from far northern Newfoundland, from the vast areas of Russia and its near neighbor Roumania; it is whistling over the banks and braes of bonnie Scotland; it is driving before it the liquor makers and liquor sellers of sunny France; it is felt in the restriction of the traffic in Germany, Italy and other European countries. It bids fair to reach the proportions of a prohibition cyclone that in the present generation shall drive the commercialized drink evil from the entire world.

"Many members of the W. C. T. U. who at the recent general election were 'first voters' cast their ballots for the presidential candidate on the prohibition party ticket. Yet as an organization we are not partisan. We rejoice that one of the chief citizens of our hostess city, ex-Gov. J. Frank Hanly, presidential condidate on the Prohibition party ticket, received 350,000 votes. We thank Mr. Hanly and Doctor Landrith for their intense campaign to help focus the attention of our nation on the paramount question of prohibition for our republic. We also heartily thank the voters of all parties who at the ballot box in state or national elections registered their convictions in favor of a prohibitory law and its strict enforcement. We are all one in a supreme effort to secure a federal amendment for prohibition. State-wide prohibition victories have been secured only when people of all political faiths have united. Our campaign for a federal amendment must be conducted on the same omnipartisan lines.

"During a prohibition campaign the hearts of the busy toilers are cheered and upheld by the enthusiasm such an effort creates. There is unity of action, fervor of spirit, joy of service and the thrill of coming victory. Election day comes. Victory is won. What next? Too often the campaigners consider their work is well over. They think they have earned the right to rest on their laurels and to enjoy the results of their arduous labors. There could not be a greater mistake. Let us never for one moment indulge the fancy that a prohibitory law can accomplish the miracles of enforcing itself. Populations rapidly change in these swift moving days. If public sentiment for prohibition and for total abstinence is kept at white heat the vast area now under prohibition can everywhere and always resist the attacks of our strongly organized foe. The same fervor of spirit which aided in securing a prohibitory law must with equal ardor be exerted to enforce it. The chorus of humanity must be kept up to prohibition concert pitch. Unity of action is still necessary.

"This year for the first time 4,000,000 women have voted for a president of the United States. The 12 suffrage states, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Washington, California, Arizona, Kansas, Oregon, Montana, Nevada and Alaska, together with Illinois, where women vote in presidential and municipal elections, have a total of 91 electoral votes.

"Closely studying the strategy of the liquor forces of our country—through their journals and the output of their publicity bureaus—and noting the vast sums of money they expend to defeat suffrage elections, we are convinced that more than any other forward step of the temperance forces they fear the votes of women."

BUSINESS THAT SUFFERS.

It is true that prohibition throws some people out of business. In Denver during the first dry month it was found that about forty washwomen gave up their work. Their husbands spent their earnings for home supplies instead of booze and the women could stay at home and take care of their families. At the same time one large laundry gained about 400 new patrons. Is prohibition bad for business? Why? Why is it that pawnshops and jails suffer a falling off in business under prohibition?

MORE WHEAT, MORE CATTLE, MORE HOGS

Land Values Sure to Advance Because of Increasing Demand for Farm Products.

The cry from countries abroad for more of the necessaries of life is acute today; tomorrow it will be still more insistent, and there will be no letup after the war. This is the day for the farmer, the day that he is coming into his own. He is gradually becoming the dictator as it becomes more apparent that upon his industry depends the great problem of feeding a great world. The farmer of Canada and the United States has it within himself to hold the position that stress of circumstances has lifted him into today. The conditions abroad are such that the utmost dependence will rest upon the farmers of this continent for some time after the war, and for this reason there is no hesitation in making the statement that war's demands are, and for a long time will be, inexhaustible, and the claims that will be made upon the soil will with difficulty be met. There are today 25,000,000 men in the fighting ranks in the old world. The best of authority gives 75 per cent and over as having been drawn from the farms. There is therefore nearly 75 per cent of the land formerly tilled now being unworked. Much of this land is today in a devastated condition and if the war should end tomorrow it will take years to bring it back to its former producing capacity.

Instead of the farmer producer producing, he has become a consumer, making the strain upon those who have been left to do the farming a very difficult one. There may be agitation as to the high cost of living, and doubtless there is reason for it in many cases. The middleman may boost the prices, combines may organize to elevate the cost, but one cannot get away from the fact that the demand regulates the supply, and the supply regulates the price. The price of wheat—in fact, all grains—as well as cattle, will remain high for some time, and the low prices that have prevailed will not come again for some time.

After the war the demand for cattle, not alone for beef, but for stock purposes, to replenish the exhausted herds of Europe, will be keen. Farm educators and advisers are telling you to prepare for this emergency. How much better it can be done on the low-priced lands of today, on lands that cost from ten to twenty dollars per acre, than it can on two and three hundred-dollar-an-acre land. The lands of Western Canada meet all the requirements. They are productive in every sense of the word. The best of grasses can be grown with abundant yields and the grain can be produced from these soils that beats the world, and the same may be said of cattle and horses. The climate is all that is required.

Those who are competent to judge claim that land prices will rise in value from twenty to fifty per cent. This is looked for in Western Canada, where lands are decidedly cheap today, and those who are fortunate enough to secure now will realize wonderfully by means of such an investment. The land that the Dominion Government is giving away as free homesteads in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are of a high class; they are abundant in every constituent that goes to make the most productive soils. The yields of wheat, oats and barley that have been grown on these lands gives the best evidence of their productiveness, and when backed up by the experience of the thousands of settlers from the United States who have worked them and become wealthy upon them, little more should be required to convince those who are seeking a home, even with limited means, that nowhere can they secure anything that will better equip them to become one of the army of industry to assist in taking care of the problem of feeding the world. These lands are free; but to those who desire larger holdings than 160 acres there are the railroad companies and land corporations from whom purchase can be made at reasonable prices, and information can be secured from the Canadian government agent, whose advertisement appears elsewhere in this paper.—Advertisement.

Speaking of Women.

"Women are certainly peculiar," remarked the home-grown philosopher.

"What seems to be ailing you now?" queried his one-man audience.

"I was thinking of the difference in the way they treat a husband after his return from a two weeks' business trip and after an absence of two hours past midnight," replied the philosophical observer.

Cynical Finance.

"Those old alchemists thought they could make gold out of the baser metals."

"Yes. But they didn't get rich."

"No. They devoted too much time to working in laboratories and not enough to circulating prospectuses and stock certificates."

Hats are taking a slanting position on the head.